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RUNNING HEAD: "We Want Yer"

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Epideictic Rhetoric in Songs from the 1896 Presidential Campaign

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"We Want Yer, McKinley":

Epideictic Rhetoric in Songs from the 1896 Presidential Campaign

Political songs, often exuberant and scathing, promoted the candidates in the 1896 campaign for President of the United States, one of the hardest-fought in United States history. This campaign featured William Jennings Bryan's famous speech, "Cross of Gold" ("Bryan's Great Speech"), not to mention McKinley's notably successful front porch campaign (see Trent & Friedenberg 78; Tindall and Shi 1026). The campaign songs, which were presumably calculated to bolster the enthusiasm of the respective candidates' supporters, were *epideictic* in tone and spirit. That is, the songs' rhetorical strategies paralleled those of epideictic speeches. Yet there is a subtle divergence. An epideictic speaker might say, "Let us praise our departed hero, and live our own lives in accordance with the values for which our hero lived." The political songs employ epideictic methods, but the line of thought is more like "Our candidate supports our values, so vote for our candidate." In other words, the usual epideictic speech *inculcates* values, while these political songs *employed* values as *topoi* for a purpose more typical of deliberative speech.

The songs offered a forum for the kind of praise and invective that decorum might prevent Bryan and McKinley from presenting themselves. Bryan rarely indulged in personal attacks, while McKinley studiously avoided direct criticisms of his opponent. A candidate might wish to seem above the fray, to appear presidential. Earlier in the century, presidential candidates sometimes furthered this goal by studiously refusing to

campaign. During the mid- and late-nineteenth century, several candidates, including William Henry Harrison and Grover Cleveland, did campaign actively for the presidency (Jamieson 9-15; Socolofsky and Spetter 11-12). Even as late as 1896, however, vestiges of the notion that the office seeks the candidate remained in a concept of presidential decorum. Like Benjamin Harrison and Garfield before him, McKinley campaigned from his home by giving speeches to visiting delegations of voters. Surrogates delivered personal attacks against his opponent (Jamieson 9-15). This made it possible for McKinley to give the impression, no matter how misleading, that he was not campaigning but merely waiting for the crowds to come and praise him.

Some of these songs presented attacks that might be too vicious for the candidates to utter themselves. Other songs offered giddy praise for the favored candidate. They supplied part of the hullabaloo that formed a part of this, perhaps the first modern presidential campaign.

Voters of the era were prone to turn out enthusiastically for political parades and meetings (Tindall and Shi 992). An interesting contrast developed, in which a campaign event might begin with a song and a rabble-rousing introductory speech, after which the candidate would rise in the midst of the commotion as a model of dignity to express his own views. (Songs could, of course, be sung in other forums, such as local rallies in the candidate's absence.)

For example, on September 11, 1896, during McKinley's front porch campaign, a group of Vermonters came to Canton, Ohio to pay a call on McKinley, to make a presentation to him, and to hear him speak. Part of their presentation was an original

song, performed by a choir from St. Albans. The choir began by addressing the economic issues of the time, but not in the usual analytical tone of deliberative speech:

> The mills are a-stoppin' an' the markets are a-droppin',
>
> We want yer, McKinley, yes we do.

The closest that this song came to giving a reason occurred when it stated that:

> We've been thinkin' till we're sad of the good old times we had
>
> Up to eighteen ninety-two.

In other words, the singers blamed the 1892 election of the Democratic President, Grover Cleveland, for hard times. They expressed pleasure that "the last four years of Grover, thank the Lord, are almost over." They derisively mentioned criticisms of the so called "robber tariff" that McKinley advocated, and assured McKinley:

> For the people are honest an' true:
>
> They'll stand up for the right with all their brawny might,
>
> An' they send, sir, their best regards to you. ("Voted for McKinley")

This overtly silly song endorsed the tariff, not because of subtle economic argument, but simply as an assertion of faith in McKinley and his ideas. Such fawning admiration might have seemed out of place in speech, and the stodgy McKinley could hardly say such things about himself. It was epideictic in the sense that it was performative and stressed praise and blame. Following the song and other political ceremonies, McKinley came forward to give a brief speech about the tariff and the money standard ("Voted for McKinley").

After looking at the features of epideictic rhetoric that are relevant to understanding such musical rhetoric, this essay examines additional songs from this presidential campaign.

For purposes of this essay, the important features about epideictic rhetoric are these: epideixis is a type of performative rhetoric, which often serves to praise or blame. Such oratory may offer proof that its subject is praiseworthy or blameworthy, but does not usually offer arguments for the values that underlie the speech. Instead, epideictic speech appeals to traditions, or uses the example of the praised person or object as a theme, or what not. Nonetheless, epideictic rhetoric may have political implications. The following discussion establishes these points.

A number of authorities have found epideictic qualities in communication modalities other than public speaking. In Greek, the word "epideixis" originally meant something like "display." Epideictic rhetoric is often thought to feature *presentation* as much as it does rational discourse: "most commentators on the history of epideictic emphasize the performance aspect of the classical conception of epideictic" (Schiappa with Timmerman, 198). In this respect, epideictic speeches resemble song, for song is a performance. Walker traces the history of ancient rhetoric to a common root with lyric poetry (viii, 8-10). The first treatise attributed to Menander includes in its discussion of epideictic literature "hymns to the gods," "celtic hymns," such as those of Sappho, and hymns about the departure of gods (*Menander Rhetor* 7-29). On the other hand, the translators are reluctant to agree that songs and poems are part of "the rhetorical tradition, strictly so called" (Russell and Wilson xxix). Sullivan notes the long-standing connection between epideictic speech and literature ("Ethos" 117). For example, DeStefano notes

epideictic qualities in Donne's verse letters. Lauxtermann points out a lively scholarly debate about epideictic epigrams, although Lauxtermann ultimately concludes that the concept of an epideictic epigram is problematic. In an effort to generalize about epideictic rhetoric, Condit finds three sets of "functions" that such speeches undertake: "definition/understanding, shaping/sharing of community, and display/entertainment" (291).

Spoken epideictic discourse, which is often associated with ceremonial occasions, usually does not assume a militant tone; if anything, epideictic speeches more often *reinforce beliefs and values* (Burgess 93-94; Chase 300). Today, epideictic speeches are often seen as a medium to express social values (e.g., Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 49-51; Sullivan, "Closer" 72). In part, epideictic rhetoric instructs by giving the audience examples of what is good or bad (Oravec 170; Sullivan, "Closer" 78). In her analysis of Donne's verse epistles, DeStefano points out that "the classical epideictic formula intends praise of the ideal to be instructive, not literal" (DeStefano 85). In an essay about the subgenre of encomium, John Poulakos notes how ancient Greek rhetoric "evolved into a force that sought to address questions of social value" (307). Dugan discusses Cicero's distinction between epideictic speeches and funeral orations. To Cicero, funeral orations, unlike epideictic speeches, served a practical civic function (37-42). Present-day theory would more likely treat a funeral oration as a type of epideictic rhetoric.

For example, the ostensive purpose of Reagan's memorial speech at Omaha Beach was to praise the veterans assembled at the commemoration, but it concluded with a point of value: he discussed the Ranger's devotion to democracy, a way of life that "is

worth dying for." He praised their readiness to wage war against despotism (Reagan 220-222).

Aristotle's influential taxonomy finds the genre to be concerned with "either praise [*epainos*] or blame [*psogos*]," while considering the honorable or dishonorable to be the ends of epideictic rhetoric (Aristotle 48; brackets in the original). Although Aristotle's taxonomy of rhetoric places praise and blame on equal, complementary footings, the epideictic speeches of the ancient Greeks tended to stress praise much more often than blame (Rountree 201). Gorgias' famous speech defending Helen, often acclaimed as a model of epideictic discourse, argues that Helen did not deserve blame (Gorgias).[1] Ancient orators did give some speeches of blame; Dugan reads Cicero's *Pro Archia* as in part a speech blaming Grattius, "the malevolent and shadowy accuser" (61).

Blame continues to find an ill-defined place in the epideictic rhetoric of the United States. Analyzing Frederick Douglass' Fourth of July oration, McClure states that "Douglass uses the strategy of comparison to contrast the character of the founding principles of the Republic and the noble actions and virtues of the 'Founding Fathers' with the institution of slavery, which is presented as the blameworthy antithesis of those principles, actions, and virtues." In doing so, Douglass chose *not* to use William Lloyd Garrison's method, which was to blame the nation's founders (McClure 431, 440). Jasinski similarly argues that Frederick Douglass' Fourth of July oration dealt with the paradox of slavery "by appropriating the epideictic genre and rearticulating the forgotten heritage of the revolution." Indeed, Jasinski alludes to the more extreme possibility that epideictic rhetoric has a "subversive potential" (72, 78).

Song, indeed, serves persuasive functions. The principal reason to sing, of course, is to express emotions. Prose and oratory, especially deliberative and judicial oratory, often express sequential reasoning, complex arguments, and researched evidence. Song, on the other hand, expresses how people feel. No one expects songs to be reasonable. No one criticizes a singer for failing to present evidence, or neglecting to cite the sources from which the singer obtained information. Few people criticize a singer for arguing *ad hominem* or even for singing things that are downright preposterous (cf. Rosenfield 139; Hauser, *Introduction* 66 on epideixis). Thus, as a method of political discourse, song helps to free the rhetor from accountability. It may do so to a greater extent than spoken epideictic rhetoric. However dubious one might find this kind of political persuasion to be from an ethical standpoint, it is no doubt useful.

Songs have served political purposes in many eras and societies. For example, in a richly textured study of the attitudes toward song of African-American civil rights activists, Sanger concludes that song was a means for activists to "articulate and share the complex emotions they experienced as a result of their involvement in the movement" (186). Sanger feels that the activists characterized their songs "as a special kind of discourse that went beyond straightforward argument or persuasion or logic and was transformative in nature" (191). In a cross-cultural study of political advertisements from 1996, Chang determines that "candidates in Taiwan tended to employ a song as the main theme of ads to a greater extent than candidates in the US." Taiwanese advertisements dedicated 23% of their time to "theme songs," compared with about 2% in the United States. Chang attributes the difference to the high-context nature of Taiwanese society (8, 12). Similarly, epideictic rhetoric inherently appeals to what people share in common.

Williams and Neely point out the greater prevalence of American political music in the nineteenth century:

> Can you remember the "Gerald Ford Polka" or the "Richard Nixon Quick Step" or the "Walter Mondale Schottisch"? Of course not. But in the nineteenth century, there were Stephen Douglas polkas and Lincoln quick steps and McClellan schottisches published as sheet music with attractive lithographed covers. (Williams & Neely, 171-175)

Williams and Neely mention that these types of political materials "have no precise modern counterparts" (171).

In some societies, the performing arts offer a more socially acceptable medium than speeches for expressing blame. Rountree remarks that speeches of blame were rare in ancient Athens, partly because of social and legal considerations such as slander suits. He points out, however, that Greek culture offered alternative, safer methods of blame, such as satiric theatre (Rountree 303-304).

In a similar way, song may offer a socially acceptable way to deliver the rhetoric of blame. Anthropologist Susan Rasmussen observed the use of persuasive songs by women of twentieth century Niger. She studied a group of people living in a seminomadic, peasant lifestyle. All conflict in this society is expressed indirectly. Societal restrictions often prevent women from expressing grievances toward men in speech. While men might employ poetry or oratory to criticize women, women compose and sing songs about men. The women's songs, which are sometimes quite pointed, often shape a man's reputation in the community (Rasmussen 30-31). Thus, women in that society could criticize men in song, but not in speech.

Mark Booth argues that "Because song comes to us in a voice, without dramatic context, passing through the consciousness of the listener, it fosters some degree of identification between singer and audience." A song does not contain discursive argument, he points out, but instead "must render on its surface a recognizable state or stance that is more or less familiar" (246, 249; cf. Burke 19-27). Thus, similarly to epideictic speech, songs operate within a cultural context of common experience.

In 1896, the Republican Party nominated the incontrovertibly reliable and conservative William McKinley for the presidency. A few weeks later, the Democrats nominated the more controversial William Jennings Bryan. Soon after, Bryan collected the nominations of the more extreme Populist and National Silver parties. The major campaign issues were the protective tariff, which McKinley advocated, and an easy money policy, championed by Bryan. Bryan's specific proposal was to permit the unlimited coinage of silver money at a ratio of 16 to 1 with gold, a proposal that many farmers supported. McKinley, although a long-time silverite himself, endorsed the gold standard during the 1896 campaign (Ecroyd, 1973; Jones 3-35).

Few of the political songs from the 1896 campaign would qualify as great art. One often instead gains a sense of outlandish, giddy enthusiasm. These songs had, however, more of a persuasive character than meets the eye.

In his campaign speeches, McKinley repeatedly compared the issues of his campaign with those of the Civil War, of which he was a decorated veteran. He did, however, studiously avoid any comments that would trade on regional animosities. For example, in one 1896 campaign speech, McKinley stated: "We must not drive anybody out of camp, but welcome everybody in" ("Major M'Kinley to the Editors"). The

campaign songs written on his behalf reflected no such scruples. For example, one published song shamelessly used the tune of "Marching Through Georgia" to the following effect:

> Hurrah! Hurrah! McKinley is the man!
>
> Hurrah! Hurrah! For "gold" he'll lead the van;
>
> Then we'll shout protection over all the glorious land
>
> While we go marching to vict'ry. (Dawsey)[2]

The basic theme, which was implied by the selection of music, not by the words themselves, was that McKinley's victory, bringing with it conservative financial policies, would compare to the Union victory in 1865. Although this implication is an enormous exaggeration, the medium of song makes it unlikely that the musicians would be called to account for the soundness of their claims. The song continued by attacking Bryan:

> Young Bryan comes from out the west, a would-be "favorite son,"
>
> With "popocrats" and "Silverites" who shout, "Sixteen to One!"
>
> He comes with startling "metaphors" and with a "silver tongue,"
>
> While we go marching to vict'ry. (Dawsey)

"Popocrats" referred to the fusion between the Populist and Democratic parties. This song derided Bryan, blaming him for the errors of the Democratic and Populist parties.

A campaign event in July 1896 clearly reflected the epideictic spirit of much of the campaign singing. A Mrs. Elroy Avery of Cleveland led a delegation of women to visit McKinley early in his front porch campaign. Mrs. Avery gave a speech praising Cleveland, "the queen city of the lower-lakes," and McKinley responded with a brief

speech advising them that women's contributions would be greatest in "the quiet and peaceful walks of life" ("Many Women"; McKinley 44-45).

The curious event concluded with a song composed by Mrs. N. Coe Stewart and performed by Mary Ellsworth Clark, who was another member of the delegation. The song opened with the line, "Ring out, bells of freedom, ring long and ring loud." It continued by assuring that "McKinley, McKinley, our captain shall be." In the next verse, the song affirmed:

> "McKinley, McKinley," the children all shout,
> the star-begemmed banner he fought for fling out.
> ("Many Women"; McKinley 44-45)

This song did not in any way expound an extended argument; rather, it consisted entirely of straightforward, rather showy praise for the Republican candidate, linking him to patriotic values. That the song was a performance made it easier for an audience to deal with than an extended economic speech, and its expression of unity seemed to bolster McKinley's cause. Presumably, only those who favored McKinley would come to such an event anyway, and a political meeting could thus easily masquerade as a ceremony that endorsed shared values.

"Marching Through Georgia" seems to have had extensive appeal as a melody for campaign songs. Yet another McKinley song used the tune, featuring the classic themes of praise and blame:

> Here's to our McKinley
> May his platform long hold sway!

Down with William Bryan,

For the gold will win the day (Lehrhoff),

and concluding "Democrats and Popocrats had better run away. / Raise high the banner of freedom!" (Lehrhoff). Yet, although unquestionably epideictic, this is just a little bit out of kilter. The most uplifting epideictic rhetoric uses praise and blame to promote values; this song uses praise and blame, appeals to the value of freedom, and implies a link between McKinley and that value; nonetheless, the conclusion is not that one should imitate McKinley's love of the flag of freedom, but to support McKinley because of that value. Thus, an epideictic formula transmutes into political expediency.

The Democrats equally employed political songs. A published, pro-Bryan song by J. B. Babcock contained the chorus:

Bryan, Bryan, Bryan leads the way,

Bryan, Bryan, Bryan leads the way

November third is coming,

The people on that day,

Will say, "We're for free silver," and Bryan leads the way. (Babcock)

This chorus, so far, simply offered praise. The song also, however, attacked McKinley:

"Well, you may follow Mac," said I,

"He'll lead you far astray.

"He'll never be elected,

And Bryan leads the way." (Babcock)

In this way, the song combined praise of Bryan with blame of McKinley. Explicit reasoning is minimal, and the implied deliberative conclusion, "vote for Bryan," is advocated as the natural outcome of knowing that "Bryan leads the way."

Some pro-Bryan songs took on overtones of prejudice. One of the tamer examples, also to the tune of "Marching Through Georgia," started with straightforward epideictic material:

> Sound the good old bugle with a bi-metallic ring.
>
> Silver free from sea to sea with lusty voices sing.
>
> Our banner with its silver starts to waiting breezed fling,
>
> While we go marching to victory. ("Silver Song")

The song continued with an attack against the financiers who, it was alleged, gave McKinley his base of support: "Every Shylock in the land is trembling now with fright, / Lest the people break the chains of gold that hold them tight" ("Silver Song"). It is possible to interpret this as an attempt to play on anti-Semitism to advance Bryan's cause. Bryan, in fact, stated during the campaign that he was not anti-Semitic ("Eggs for Bryan"). However, the sung rhetoric took on a vicious quality that, even in that era, would almost certainly not have been acceptable in political speech. This enabled the candidate's rhetoric to seem decorous, while the campaign song, with which Bryan was not directly associated, appealed to prejudice.

That so many songs, both Democratic and Republican, adopted the tune and phrasing of "Marching Through Georgia" in itself gave them a confrontational quality. The issues of the campaign were implicitly compared, not with wise forebears or sound

economic principles, but with General Sherman's brutal but victorious campaign through eastern Georgia.

A more conventional type of personal attack occurred in a song entitled "We Want None of Thee," to the tune of "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean." This song began by pointing out how the millionaires were contributing so greatly to McKinley's campaign: "Our millionaires seem to be troubled, / They're op'ning their coffers you see." The song derisively mentioned Cleveland industrialist Mark Hanna, who chaired the Republican National Committee in 1896, and assured that "Bryan's the man that will make silver free." The next verse continued:

McKinley lives over at Canton,

He's backed up by the East, don't you see;

But the people will say in November,

Oh, Billy, we want none of thee. (Saunders 167-168)

This rather pointed personal slur against McKinley took a tone that skilled politicians were unlikely to risk in a speech.

Reference to social values is not universal in these songs; however, a pro-McKinley song published in Vassar College's newspaper appealed to the traditional American values of freedom and prosperity, with protection (i.e., the tariff) thrown in for good measure:

Hurrah for brave McKinley

For Garret Hobart true!

A ballot that is cast for them

Is cast for freedom, too.

Prosperity, Protection,

We're going to vote them in. (Lehrhoff)

Once again, however, the fundamental values are not presented for imitation, but for political action. The song's argument is a bit slippery, since the partisan issue of protection stands side by side with the universal ideals of freedom and prosperity.

This study does not offer anything like a comprehensive examination of political songs. Songs from different campaigns, or different eras, might exhibit different characteristics. Indeed, given the ephemeral nature of the material, there is no way to know whether the songs examined here were even a representative sample of the political songs from this one election.

Characteristically, these songs glorified their favored candidate. They often made a scapegoat out of the opponent. In some cases, they blamed the nation's problems on some outside group, to whom the opponent is declared beholden. They were thus very much concerned with praise and blame, the goals that Aristotle attributed to epideictic rhetoric, but in a tone that was decidedly exaggerated and sometimes offensive.

Negative political campaigning via broadcasting is standard practice in present-day elections. Lacking television and radio, political rhetors in 1896 sometimes used songs to express negative, unfair, unsupported, or unreasonable criticisms of the opponent. The songs at times did so with more wit than do political advertisements of the early 21st century. On the other hand, the "Silver Song" about Shylock was easily as vicious as any latter-day political message. Some political advertisements do not seek an "intellectual response" (Jamieson 521), and neither did most of these songs.

One could conjecture that political songs may employ epideictic forms of praise and blame, lack extended argument, and partially divorce the rhetors from accountability. Unlike epideictic speeches, which more often praise a person and deny that the person is blameworthy, political songs of 1896 often pronounced blame. This does not mean that targeted groups and individuals would find these songs inoffensive, much the contrary. In these respects, the political songs functioned as a qualitatively different type of persuasive discourse than spoken rhetoric. That the songs were epideictic in tone may have partly insulated them from being refuted, except by equally offensive or frivolous songs from the opposing party. Thus, they constituted an extra-rational form of political discourse.

One might question whether epideictic forms are suitable for political rhetoric, which deals with policy, one would think, call for deliberative rhetoric. The question is a knotty one. If one holds to some model of rational political decision-making, songs such as those of 1896 are patently irrelevant. Thus, Smith complains that Vice-President Dan Quayle "attempted to conceal his desire for re-election in epideictic rhetoric, a difficult task in the midst of a presidential election." Smith finds a contradiction between epideictic rhetoric and the covert "deliberative message, 'vote for our ticket'" that is inherent in political rhetoric (157, 159). On the other hand, praise and blame are the themes of epideictic rhetoric, and it makes sense to vote for candidates who are praiseworthy and against those who are blameworthy.

Mark Booth's contention that song works from the context of an identification between singer and listener profoundly explains the 1896 campaign songs. The songs did not plead to change the audience's mind, but rather to share an emotion. For example,

one would not sing a political song to one’s opponents hoping to convert them. (One might, conceivably, sing to one’s opponents to irritate them.) Presumably, these songs’ political purpose was to excite persons who were already committed, at least tentatively, to one candidate or the other.

Aristotle held that epideictic rhetoric more often than not relates to the present (Aristotle 48; Garver 71-72). This causes some trouble in the case of campaign songs, since the songwriters and singers were presumably interested in a deliberative issue, the future election of their favorite candidate. Nonetheless, the songs advocated candidates mostly by praising and blaming them. In doing so, they permitted the candidate some decorum: the candidates did not have to praise themselves, or to condemn their opponents, because someone else was doing so for them. Thus, the candidates could put across an impression of dignity.

There were, to be sure, some exceptions to the rule. A song by C. E. Lemon, “McKinley’s the Man,” brings up various campaign issues: lines such as “Factories and banks have closed / The strikes we’ll always remember” and “Sound money is what we’ll have / And American labor protected” (Lemon) discuss the issues as specifically as the typical campaign speech of the time. This song could be classified as deliberative rather than epideictic, for it gave various reasons for McKinley’s election McKinley.

Song is an ancient method of expression in its own right—overall, over the millennia, probably a more popular method than speeches. One could say that these political songs have epideictic qualities. Perhaps one could equally assert music to be the primary medium, and argue that epideictic speeches take on aspects of songs whose import is to persuade. Since both partake of the genus of performance, one should not

feel undue surprise in either case. As Walker points out, "A 'lyric' is, in effect, a versified or sung oration, a variety of epideictic discourse" (155). In persuasive song and epideictic speech alike, however, the use of the *topoi* of praise and blame, coupled with the substitution of performance for evidence, remains interesting to the student of political rhetoric. In that the songs assessed blame as readily as they lavished praise, they may partially resemble satiric poetry or theatre. Yet, one could hearken back to Thomas Wilson's comment that each of Aristotle's three genres of rhetoric serves a given end, and yet any one may contain any of the others. Thus: "he that shall haue cause to praise any one bodie, shall haue just cause to speake of Iustice, to entreate of profite, and ioyntly to talke of one theing with an other" (Wilson 11).

Thus, epideicitc and deliberative rhetoric may sometimes find a place to meet. Epideictic rhetoric, strictly speaking, does not address a judge or assembly who will make a decision, but it might nudge an audience's thinking toward a way of thinking (Walker 8-9; Kennedy 153). Songs, with their exuberance and emotionalism, lend themselves to a particular kind of non-argumentative political discourse. It would certainly be interesting to uncover what uses songs played in other political campaigns, and what modes of communication may have taken their place in more recent political rhetoric. An additional intriguing question is to what extent advocates might present deliberative discourse that masquerades as something else. Discussing epideictic rhetoric, Wayne Booth laments that in the late twentieth century deliberative rhetoric has sometimes been "overwhelmed by demonstrations for values or against evils in the present." He feels that this can lead to a rhetoric marked by "destructive escalators" (W. Booth 155). Such rhetoric clearly troubles Booth. On the other hand, epideictic rhetoric

implies that that tradition or social standing authorizes the rhetor to locate the object of praise in the criteria of excellence. Butler, on the other hand, notes the social significance of the power that "naming" has to cause injury ("Burning" 155; see also Butler, *Excitable* 44-49).

In the preface to a collection of political songs from Medieval England, Wright states that "Few historical documents are more interesting or important than the contemporary songs" which make use of satire, which "stirred up the courage" of political enthusiasts, or "lamented over evil counsels and national calamities" (vii). Such a sentiment remains true in the study of the songs of the 1896 campaign, which reveal much about the feelings and attitudes of the politics of that era.

Unfortunately, the consequences of such reflection may not be entirely happy. These songs appealed to common ground and shared values as *topoi*, but not as uplifting principles for emulation. This may be symptomatic of a problem about which Smith remarked, that epideictic rhetoric in a political campaign "allows a speaker to imply negative qualities about opponents and programs under the guise of a high minded call to conscience" (162). This, of course, is exactly the purpose that the campaign songs served in 1896: to attack the opponent and to praise the candidate, while allowing the candidates themselves to remain at least a little bit above the fray, to maintain presidential decorum in the midst of electoral chaos. Burke suspects that epideictic discourse will be most prominent during an era of "rhetorical decay," as it is a poor substitute for debate (Burke 71).

Thus, although most of the songs were clearly epideictic, one could interpret them as representative of debased epideictic rhetoric. Commenting that epideictic speeches

“educate us in the vocabulary of civic virtues,” Hauser laments “political campaign films that often display the candidate as an object for display rather than the candidates’ actions as a source of possibilities for political invention” (“Aristotle” 19-20). Similarly, although these political songs were, in a way, enjoyable, they glorified and condemned the candidates for purely utilitarian objectives, employing epideictic means for more specific ends.

Notes

[1] Schiappa, however, questions whether this speech, which predated Aristotle, is epideictic in Aristotle's sense of the term, or even in a disciplinary sense of the term (117).

[2] "Marching Through Georgia's" light-hearted, catchy tune was ideal for a campaign song. The chorus reads, "Hurrah! Hurrah! We bring the Jubilee! / Hurrah! Hurrah! The flag that makes you free, / So we sang the chorus from Atlanta to the sea, / While we were marching through Georgia" (http://www.acws.co.uk/songs/georgia.htm). Readers may judge for themselves the arrogance involved in implicitly comparing McKinley's victory with the Jubilee, which was the ancient Jewish day of freedom from slavery. Even by the standards of 1896, portions of "Marching Through Georgia" would have to be considered racist.

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